Fall 2011

How age and religiosity affect forgiving others

Andrew Schaefer
University of New Hampshire, Durham

HOW AGE AND RELIGIOSITY AFFECT FORGIVING OTHERS

BY

ANDREW SCHAEFER
BA Sociology, Keene State College, 2009

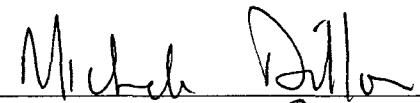
THESIS

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of

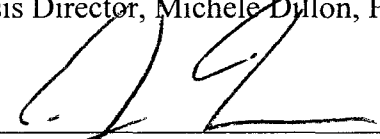
Master or Arts
in
Sociology

September, 2011

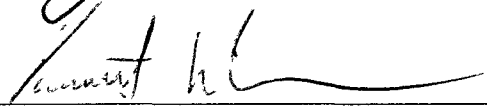
This thesis has been examined and approved.



Thesis Director, Michele Dillon, Professor of Sociology



James Tucker, Associate Professor of Sociology



Kenneth Johnson, Professor of Sociology

Date

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

HOW AGE AND RELIGIOSITY AFFECT FORGIVING OTHERS

By

Andrew Schaefer

University of New Hampshire, September, 2011

Using data from the General Social Survey (1998), Robert Wuthnow's Forgiveness Survey (1999), and ten in-depth interviews of members of an evangelical church (2010-11), I investigate three research questions: (1) How are age and religiosity related to people's attitudes toward forgiving others? (2) Do age and religiosity have the same effect on people's forgiving behaviors? (3) How do respondents' accounts of their own experiences forgiving others help explain and contribute to answers of the first two questions? I found that those with the highest levels of religiosity were most likely to have positive attitudes toward forgiving and to have engaged in a forgiving behavior. Older respondents were significantly less likely to have engaged in a forgiving behavior, but age had no effect on an individual's forgiving attitudes. I argue here that the value of forgiving others is learned through Christian religious involvement and affects a person's actual behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness of others has increasingly become a public phenomenon. In recent years we have seen public rituals of apology and forgiveness from politicians, nations, religious groups, and corporations. Some of the most salient examples of this involve politicians Anthony Weiner and Bill Clinton. Both of their infidelities were publicly broadcast to U.S. citizens forcing them to publicly apologize to anyone who has hurt by their transgressions. Politicians are not the only ones affected by increased public scrutiny. Within a couple of decades, Corporations like Exxon and BP have publicly addressed the environmental tragedies caused by their companies; religious institutions like the Roman Catholic Church have had occasion to ask the public forgiveness after their pedophilia scandal publicly unraveled; and even nations like South Africa have publicly addressed the past injustices of the apartheid. No groups are exempt from the increased public scrutiny we have seen in recent decades. The public nature of this scrutiny has led forgiving others to be more public as well.

Nowadays the idea of having a private dimension to one's life can no longer be assumed. In our global Internet society, personal interactions are dissected and studied ad nauseam. Moreover, with the constant stream of information coming from the 24-hour news cycle, many transgressions that could once be swept under the rug can be seen and interpreted by anyone with an Internet connection. Without the Internet and pervasive news organizations, stories about the Gulf oil spill, the Catholic Church, and political scandals are unlikely to have had the same public circulation and focus.

Of course, what constitutes a transgression is socially constructed. Societal values are not inherently right or wrong but are created and infused with meaning through social interaction. These norms can often seem unusual and arbitrary to outside observers. Even within a particular society, such as the United States, the norms governing behavior can vary greatly depending on the group one happens to be a part of. In any event, however, once a transgression has been made there are complex rituals one must perform in order to apologize or make amends for the wrongdoing. Anthony Weiner and Bill Clinton gave long, televised apologies to the public, their constituents, and their wives, all who were harmed because of their actions. Like the transgressions themselves, apology rituals are often different between cultures and are infused with many different meanings (Smith 2008).

The complexity and abundance of public apology rituals hint at the importance of forgiveness in society. Apology rituals and rituals of forgiveness go hand in hand. Like Weiner and Clinton, individuals and organizations go through the process of apologizing in the hope that they will be forgiven for their mistakes and admitted back into the social groups that have momentarily condemned or excluded them.

In the United States (and many other Western countries), the pervasive influence of Christianity means that forgiveness not only has secular meaning, but religious meaning as well. The concept of forgiveness, including forgiveness of oneself, of others, and asking for God's forgiveness, is found throughout the New Testament of the Bible. Two examples come from the books of Matthew and Luke, "Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors" (Matthew 6:12); "If he sins against you seven times in the day, and seven times returns, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:4). With the

historically deep intertwining of Christian ideas in American secular society, forgiving others is a value that many in the United States are likely to hold. It is this forgiveness of others, how it is practiced, who practices it, and what it means to practice it that is the focus of this thesis.

Forgiveness itself is a complex concept that has multiple meanings and can be interpreted many different ways based on cultural context and situation. As such, measuring and defining forgiveness scientifically has proven to be difficult (McCullough and Worthington Jr. 1999). Also, sociological research on the general relationship between religiosity and forgiving others is limited. The few articles focusing on this relationship, conducted mostly through a psychological lens, have found a positive relationship between Christian religious involvement and valuing forgiveness (Edwards, Lapp-Rincker, Magyar-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, Brown, and Lopez 2002; Macaskill 2007; Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usae, Neto, and Shafighi 2003; Rokeach 1969). For example, Rokeach (1969) found that those identifying as Christian are more likely to rate forgiveness as a value that is important to them than those not identifying as Christian. Likewise, Mullet et al. (2003) note that church-attending Christians are more likely than others to report being "willing to forgive."

Research on religious involvement and actual forgiving of others presents findings that are less clear. For instance, some research has shown that respondents identifying as Christian are only slightly higher than others on a forgiving others scale (Toussaint and Williams 2008), while other researchers have found that Christian religious involvement had no effect on a respondent's likelihood to forgive others in

specific situations (Hui et al. 2006). Forgiving behaviors, therefore, do not have the same straightforward predictors as attitudes toward forgiveness.

The specific aim of this thesis is to fill gaps in the literature on religious involvement and forgiving behaviors and attitudes. To do this, different theoretical orientations will be incorporated as frameworks for understanding the questions at hand. More specifically, two theories, Weber's theory of value-rational behavior, as elaborated in chapter one of his *Economy and Society,* and attitude-behavior theory, discussed by Manfredo and Shelby (1987) are analyzed to determine the extent to which religiosity in general, is related to attitudes and actions of forgiveness. A third theory, life-course theory, as described by Elder (1975), is used to provide a framework for understanding how forgiving attitudes and behaviors might change over an individual's lifetime.

Along with the incorporation of different theoretical orientations, this study also includes different methodologies than past studies on religious involvement and forgiving behaviors have used. This study is designed in three sections based on their specificity and generalizability. Section one is the most general and uses nationally representative survey data to observe how both age and religiosity relate to people's attitudes toward forgiving others. Getting more specific, in section two I look at a nationally representative survey of members of small religious groups to observe how age and religiosity are related to whether or not people think membership in their small group has helped them forgive another person. Lastly, and most specific, in-depth interviews from a highly religious sample of evangelical Protestants are analyzed to provide explanation and context to the findings from sections 1 and 2, along with several themes of their own. The use of in-depth interviews is a departure from most literature on this topic that has

relied heavily on the use of survey data as an analytical tool. It is advantageous to use interviews in this study because they provide a level of depth that most studies on forgiving others have no been able to offer. Furthermore, interviews will provide context and understanding to the quantitative survey analysis.

With these additions to help fill the gaps in previous research in mind, this research project attempts to answer three questions. One, how are age and religiosity related to people's attitudes toward forgiving others? Two, do age and religiosity have a similar affect on people's behaviors towards forgiving others? And three, how do respondents' accounts of their own experiences of forgiving others help explain the answers to the first two questions?

Outline of Sections

The first sections describe the relevant literature and theoretical rationale that are related to the main research questions. Literature on religiosity and attitudes toward forgiving others, religiosity and forgiving behaviors, age and forgiving behaviors, and religiosity and age are discussed, followed by explanations of value-rational action, life course, and attitude-behavior theories. Next, I discuss several hypotheses that emerge from the related literature and theoretical rationale.

The next section is an explanation of the various methodological approaches used in this project. General facts about the two surveys used in this analysis are described including how all dependent and independent variables used in the analysis are defined. In-depth interview data is also described here along with the general methodological approaches used to analyze the data.

After the methods are described, the findings, discussion and conclusions of the analysis are presented. The findings include univariate, bivariate, and multivariate statistical analyses along with findings from the in-depth interviews. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in light of the relevant literature and several general conclusions that can be drawn along with limitations and directions for future research.

CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I discuss four areas of interest. To begin, I look at literature focusing on the relationships between religiosity and forgiveness, specifically looking at individual's attitudes toward forgiving others. Next, I discuss literature focusing on the relationships between religiosity and forgiving behaviors. After that, I review the limited amount of literature specifically looking at the relationships between forgiveness and age. Lastly, I discuss the literature looking at differences in religiosity across the life course. After I reviewed the literature I highlight the limitations and gaps and describe how my research plans to address them. In the final section of this chapter I describe three theories, life-course, attitudes vs. behavior, and value-rational action theories, that helped guide and inform the research I present in this study.

Religiosity and Forgiving Attitudes

Studies consistently find a positive correlation between Christian religious involvement and the value of forgiveness. Rokeach (1969) conducted a survey of 1,391 adult Protestants, Catholics, Jews, and those with no religious affiliation and asked them to rank seventeen different values in order of importance. Christians (both Protestants and Catholics) rated forgiveness eleven points higher than Jews and twelve points higher than those with no religious preference. Subsequent research has cited this finding as evidence

that Christians are more likely to value forgiveness than non-Christians (Macaskill 2007; Mullet et al. 2003).

In a British sample of Christian clergy members, lay Christians, and those with no religious affiliation, Macaskill (2007) found that members of the clergy (N=209) rated the importance of forgiveness significantly higher than both the lay Christian sample (N=176) and the sample with no religious affiliation (N=65). Furthermore, the clergy sample scored significantly higher than the lay Christian group and the no religious affiliation group on levels of forgiving others. Differences between the lay Christian group and the no religious affiliation group were not significant regarding importance of forgiveness and the value of forgiveness. Macaskill (2007) concludes that degree of religious involvement might be a better predictor of the importance of forgiveness than religious affiliation in general.

Mullet et al. (2003) report similar findings in a non-random sample of 774 adults living in Italy and France. Using survey data they found that willingness to forgive was higher for those who went to church on a regular basis than those who were Christian but did not attend church and those who were reportedly non-religious. There was no difference between those who were Christian but did not attend church and those who were reportedly non-religious.

Recent literature shows consistent findings on the relationship between religiosity and valuing forgiveness. When asked to rank a list of values Christians rank forgiveness significantly higher than Jews and the non-religious (Rokeach 1969). When strength of religious involvement is added to the equation it appears that the strongly religious are

more likely to report strong importance of forgiveness (Macaskill 2007) and higher willingness to forgive (Mullet et al. 2003) than the less religious and non-religious.

Religiosity and Forgiving Behaviors

Measuring forgiving behaviors is often referred to in the literature as measuring "transgression-specific" forgiveness. These measures are called transgression specific because respondents are asked to think of a time when they forgave another (or couldn't) and then answer questions about how and why they did (or didn't) forgive that individual (for more see McCullough and Worthington Jr 1999). In other words, before answering questions, respondents are asked to think of a transgression. This is an ideal way of measuring forgiving behaviors in a survey because it takes forgiveness out of the abstract and asks for a concrete example of a relevant situation from the respondent's life. Most studies focusing on the relationship between religiosity and forgiving behaviors use this transgression- specific method (Fox and Thomas 2008; Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 2006; Toussaint and Williams 2008; Wuthnow 2000).

In light of past literature on valuing forgiveness, atudies looking at religiosity and forgiving behaviors yield surprising results. Some studies have found that religious involvement has no effect on measures of forgiving behaviors (Fox and Thomas 2008; Hui et al. 2006). For example, in a sample of 944 students and teachers from "6 secondary co-educational schools" in Hong Kong, China, Hui et al. (2006) found that being affiliated with the Christian religion "or having regular religious practice" had no effect on a person's likelihood to forgive others in their specific situations. Other studies have found that Christian religious involvement is related to forgiving behaviors but "the difference [between Christians and non-Christians] was surprisingly small (Toussaint et

al 2008). Similarly, Wuthnow (2000) finds that church attendance is a significant predictor of forgiving behaviors. However, Wuthnow does not include a measure of religious identification (Protestant, Catholic, or other) making it difficult to know if Christians, or certain types of Christians, are more likely to forgive than others.

The findings presented here are surprising in light of studies that have looked at religiosity and attitudes toward forgiveness. Studies focusing on forgiveness attitudes consistently find that measures of religiosity like whether one identifies as Christian and frequency of church attendance are positively correlated with valuing forgiveness (Edwards, Lapp-Rincker, Magyar-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, Brown, and Lopez 2002; Macaskill 2007; Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usae, Neto, and Shafighi 2003; Rokeach 1969). Studies looking at forgiving behaviors find results that are either weak (Toussaint et al. 2008) or non-existent (Fox and Thomas 2008; Hui et al. 2006).

Given these surprising, and often conflicting, findings it becomes more important to include multiple measures of religiosity like church attendance, importance of religion in one's life, and religious identification measures when looking at both forgiving behaviors and attitudes. It also becomes important to look at other variables that might help explain this complex relationship more clearly. In this study, age is incorporated to help predict attitudes and behaviors related to forgiving others.

Age and Forgiveness

The capacity and willingness to forgive others has been linked to age. For instance Enright et al. (1989), Park & Enright (1997), and Subkoviak et al. (1995) have demonstrated a positive relationship between age and the general forgiving of others. More specifically, Subkoviak et al. (1995), in a study of college students their parents

found that the parents scored higher on a religious involvement scale that asked respondents to answer several questions about forgiveness based on the most recent situation where they had forgiven another. However, statistical testing was not conducted to assess whether or not this finding was significant.

One study has looked specifically at the relationship between age and forgiveness. Toussaint et al. (2001) found that old age adults scored higher on levels of forgiveness of others than younger age groups. Respondents were not asked if they were members of a religious organization. Also, the authors note that their measures of forgiveness "may engender socially desirable responses" (256). However, at the very least, this demonstrates that it might be more socially desirable for older people to be forgiving than younger people.

This finding makes sense in light of a common assumption about the aging process. As individuals age, the importance of making amends with others and placing their lives in perspective increases (see Crosnoe 2002). Thus, it is possible that, as individuals age—especially as they enter late adulthood—they would place a stronger emphasis on forgiving others.

Few studies have specifically studied the relationship between forgiving others and age. The ones that have are victim to small non-representative samples that make statistical testing irrelevant. This study aims to advance the literature on age and forgiving others by using a large nationally representative sample in its analysis.

Age and Religiosity

Age has also been linked to changes in religiosity (Dillon and Wink 2001; Hout and Greely 1987; Krause and Ingersoll-Dayton 2001). Most studies that have considered

age have used it as a control variable, not as a part of the focal relationship. This makes it difficult to take into account events during the life course that might impact the focal relationship between religious involvement and forgiving others.

Dillon and Wink (2001), using longitudinal data collected from two cohorts between 1934 and 2000, found that age was related to religious involvement. However, the relationship was not linear. Dillon and Wink find that the relationship between age and religious involvement is "best described as a shallow U-curve" (81). Individuals in this study had their highest levels of religious involvement in adolescence and in late adulthood with a dip in church attendance between these years.

Hout and Greeley (1987), using a large nationally representative sample of survey respondents collected between 1975 and 1984 found that church attendance increased with age. More specifically, Hout and Greeley found that the largest increase in religious involvement occurred during the transition into late adulthood. This finding coincided with Dillon and Wink's (2001) and other studies findings that individuals increasingly turn to religion in old age, in part, to deal with the increased adversity that comes with aging.

Shortcomings in the Literature

Several shortcomings from the literature have emerged. First, all of the research described above has used surveys as the sole data source. This represents two main shortcomings in the forgiveness data: one, a lack of generalizable samples and two, a lack of in-depth interview data. First, surveys are a good data-gathering tool because they allow the researcher to get broad-level data on large amounts of people. What surveys lack in depth is made up for by their generalizability (if there is a random probability

sample) to the target population as a whole. For survey data to be generalizable, however, respondents must be selected using a random, systematic sampling method. A large majority of the studies described here do not do that. For example, Fox and Thomas (2008) use a non-random snowball sample and Hui et al. (2006) are looking at a nonrandom sample of teachers and students. By not using generalizable samples these studies maintain the negative aspect of using survey data (less depth) and lose the positive aspect (generalizability). To address this shortcoming in the literature two nationally representative samples are used to provide results that are generalizable.

Second, there is a lack of in-depth interview data in the literature. The use of in-depth interviews as a data source allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the topic at hand. This type of data is especially necessary when difficulties measuring forgiveness, due to social desirability and the relative ease of remembering an instance of being unforgiving than being forgiving, have been cited in the literature (McCullough and Worthington Jr 1999; Tsang et al. 2005). To address this concern, in-depth interviews are used to provide context for explaining the findings from the survey analysis.

A final shortcoming in the literature is that few studies consider the effect of age on the relationships between religiosity and forgiving attitudes and behaviors. Most studies that have considered age have used it as a control variable, not as part of the focal relationship. However, studies looking at the relationship between both age and forgiving behaviors and age and religiosity have found positive correlations between these variables. I address this shortcoming by focusing specifically on respondents' age in the analyses. While the literature presented here is lacking when it comes to the shortcomings

described above, there are also theoretical reasons to consider the relationships I propose to study here. These reasons will be discussed in the next sections.

Theoretical Rationale

Value-Rational Action

A key sociological principle states that, through socialization, individuals internalize the social structure, or the norms, beliefs, and values of the culture they are a part of (Berger and Luckmann 1967). A commonly held value held by Christians is forgiveness (Rokeach 1969; McCullough and Worthington Jr 1999). The importance of forgiveness in Christian texts and rituals leads members of Christian religious groups to internalize those values and make them their own. This internalization of cultural values can translate into corresponding actions; or, what Weber would call, "value-rational actions" Weber 1978).

Value-rational actions are one of four ideal typical social actions described by Weber. Weber defines value-rational actions as "actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty..." (Weber 1978, 25). In other words, value-rational actions are those actions that are motivated by a sense of duty or obligation to a certain value, regardless of whether or not those actions will lead to a "successful" outcome. Furthermore, value-rational actions are often seen as "demands" on the actor that are "binding" to them, meaning that they have no choice but to act in relation to those values (Weber 1978, 25).

Weber's theory of value-rational action can be applied when looking at religiosity and forgiving behaviors and attitudes. Since Christians report valuing forgiveness more

than members of other religious groups (Rokeach 1969) and forgiveness plays an important role in the Christian faith (McCullough and Worthington Jr. 1999), one would expect Christian individuals to feel more obligated to forgive than members of groups that don't value forgiveness as strongly.

To note, Weber mentions that "it would be very unusual to find concrete cases of action, especially of social action, which were oriented *only* in one or another of ways" (Weber 1978, 26). Actions rarely fall exclusively into just one of the four types of action. With this in mind, it is important to keep Weber's three other types of social action: instrumentally rational, affectual, and traditional in mind. These three types of action respectively refer to those actions that are rationally calculated based on the achievement of certain "ends," based on emotion, and based on tradition or habit (Weber 1978, 24-25). It will be important to keep these other types of action in mind when considering the findings presented later in this thesis.

Attitudes Versus Behavior

Literature on attitudes vs. behavior focuses on the discrepancies between respondents' attitudes toward certain concepts and their behaviors based on those attitudes. In other words, there is often a disconnect between what individuals say they value and what they actually do in reality. This is often due to social desirability that leads individuals to claim to hold more favorable opinions than they actually do. A popular example of this occurs when individuals are asked how often they attend church services. More people report attending church at least once a week than is physically possible based on pew counts. It's not that individuals are lying; rather, when people make estimations about themselves the error is almost always in their favor.

Research on attitudes vs. behavior has shown that correlations between self-reported measures of a behavior and the actual instance of that behavior can be anywhere from .63 to .78 (Manfredo and Shelby 1987). This is low considering that self-report measures of behaviors are often used as a proxy for actual behaviors.

An "attitudes vs. behavior approach" to the relationship between religiosity and forgiving others would say that self-report measures of forgiving others are likely to be higher than actual levels of forgiving others. This logic runs counter to Weber's theory of value-rational action. As a result, testing both of these theories will be a large part of the statistical analysis.

Life-Course Theory

Life-course theory is a sociological paradigm (see Elder 1975; Elder 1998) that stresses the importance of the timing of transitions into different social roles. In other words, *when* an individual transitions into marriage, motherhood, retirement, etc. matters just as much as those transitions themselves. For instance, motherhood is likely to be a different experience for fifteen-year-old girl in high school than it is for a thirty-year-old woman leaving graduate school. To treat both of these individuals as the same because they are both mothers would ignore much of the social context around their different situations.

Research on the life course has demonstrated the importance of both religiosity and forgiveness of others in the process of "successful aging." Religion in late life has been linked to increased life satisfaction and skills used to cope with adversity (Dillon and Wink 2001). Thus, it is possible that, in order to deal with the increased adversity and complications that come with old age, many individuals turn to organized religion.

Research from a life-course perspective generally requires a longitudinal data source so the researcher can account for the timing of certain transitions in an individual's life. Cross-sectional data does not provide the ideal situation for a life-course perspective because it looks solely at one instance in time. However, age of respondent can provide a glimpse of where they are in their life at the moment in time that the survey was conducted. This can allow age to be used as a proxy for a life course variable. As a result, age becomes an important variable when considering the relationship between religious involvement and forgiving behaviors.

Along these lines, in-depth interviews can also be used to simulate longitudinal data. Because in-depth interviews are less structured than survey data, the interview can be used to probe into a respondent's past. This allows the interviewer and respondent to enter into a dialogue that will help gain valuable information about the respondent's past. While past experiences will always be colored by the respondent's current situation, the in-depth interview will still be able to obtain useful information about their past that one could not get through survey data. For this reason, in-depth interviews are a vital part of this research.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses for the General Social Survey

The literature and theoretical rationale described above provide several hypotheses to test during the statistical analysis.

Hypothesis 1. Life course theory highlights the importance of timing in the transitions into and out of certain roles. As a result, age, as a measure of "where"

individuals are in their life-course, will be a significant predictor of a respondent's attitudes toward forgiving others.

Hypothesis 2. A commonly held principle of socialization is that, through involvement in a group, individuals learn and reinforce the norms, values, and beliefs of that group. As a result, those who identify as Christian and those with high levels of religiosity will be more likely than others to report having positive attitudes toward forgiving others.

Hypotheses for the Forgiveness Survey

Hypothesis 3. Literature on the relationship between age and forgiving behaviors has shown that an older age group scored higher on levels of forgiving behaviors than a younger age group (Toussaint et al 2001). As a result, as age increases amongst respondents will be more likely to have engaged in a forgiving behavior.

Hypothesis 4. Weber's theory of value-rational actions states that individuals who hold a certain value will feel more obligated than others to act on that value when presented with a situation that requires their action. As a result, those who identify as Christian and those with high levels of religiosity in the Forgiveness Survey sample will be more likely than others to report engaging in forgiving behaviors.

Hypotheses for Both the General Social Survey and the Forgiveness Survey

Hypothesis 5. Attitudes vs. behavior theory states that self-report data on behaviors are likely to overestimate actual occurrences of that behavior in reality. As a result, even though Christian individuals report valuing forgiveness more than non-Christians, they will not be more likely than non-Christians to report engaging in forgiving behaviors.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

In this methods section, I discuss the multiple methods used in this paper and lay out my plans for analyzing that data. First, I discuss the survey data used to describe and analyze people's attitudes toward forgiving others, the 1998 General Social Survey. Next, I describe the data used to analyze people's forgiving behaviors, Robert Wuthnow's forgiveness survey. After that, I describe the in-depth interview data specifically focusing on the interviewees and the interview process. In the final part of this methods section I provide a detailed plan for the analysis of the data described here.

Section 1: The 1998 General Social Survey

The survey data come from the 1998 General Social Survey. The General Social Survey (GSS) is conducted approximately every two years by the National Opinion Research Center. In general, the GSS provides a cross-sectional look at a nationally representative probability sample of the non-institutionalized population ages 18 and over.

The GSS uses a stratification process to select households to survey. To select participants, the United States is broken into several groups based on population. The number of people selected from each group is proportional to that group's size. This allows the GSS to select a sample that is closely representative of the United States population as a whole. Once households are selected to interview, in-person structured

interviews are the principal mode of data collection. All percentages and regression results from the GSS are weighted to adjust for sampling bias and to more closely match the actual demographics of the United States.

The 1998 GSS is ideal for this analysis as it includes a special module on religion that includes questions about forgiveness that are not asked in any other GSS year. Data were collected between February and April of 1998. The 76 percent response rate yields a sample size of 2,832 non-institutionalized, English speaking individuals ages 18 and over. Of those 2,832 initial respondents, 1,417 were asked questions about forgiveness. These 1,417 individuals will constitute the N for this analysis.

Measures from the 1998 GSS

Forgiving attitudes. Forgiving attitudes are measured using the question: "How often has the respondent felt the following way due to religious beliefs: I have forgiven those who hurt me." Response categories for this question are 1 = always, 2 = often, 3 = seldom, and 4 = never. Because this question does not ask the respondent to think about a specific instance of forgiving another, it is likely to produce socially desirable responses. People are more likely to respond in ways that they would ideally act, not how they actually act. As a result, responses to this question should be interpreted cautiously. At their best, positive responses to this question (that they always or often forgive others) should be interpreted as people's attitudes toward forgiving others, not their actual behaviors.

Age. In the multivariate models age is used as a continuous variable. Life course theory emphasizes the importance of timing in the entering and exiting of certain life roles like marriage and child birth. As a result, in the bivariate analyses age is broken into

categories meant to represent certain life transitions: those less than twenty-five years old (adolescence), those between twenty-five and thirty-four (early adulthood), thirty-five to forty-four (adulthood), forty-five to fifty-four (early late-adulthood), fifty-five to sixty-four (late adulthood), sixty-five and older (retirement/elderly).

Religiosity. I measure religiosity using three variables: church attendance, self-described religiousness, and religious identification. Church attendance specifically asks "How often do you attend religious services?" Response categories: 8=Several times a week; 7=Every week; 6=Nearly every week; 5=Two to three times a month; 4=About once a month; 3=Several times a year; 2=About once or twice a year; 1=Less than once a year; 0=Never. As Smith (1998) has noted, measures of church attendance are subject to increased social desirability. Therefore, church attendance rates should be seen more as an overall measure of respondent's religiosity than their actual frequency of attending church services. In the analyses, those who attend church weekly or more will be created into a dummy variable I also include church attendance as a child to measure early life socialization of Christian values.

To measure self-described religiousness I use the question: "To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?" Response categories: 1=Not at all religious; 2=Slightly religious; 3=Moderately religious; 4=Very religious. I include this measure to provide a more complete picture of religiosity. How often one attends church and to what religious group one identifies with might mean different things to different people. By including this measure, I am able to use respondents' views of their own religiosity to control for some of those differences.

To measure religious identification I use responses to a religious preference question categorizing respondents into 13 different religious groups including those who admit no religious preference. From the 13 groups, I created a categorical variable where Protestants, Catholics, respondents with any "other" religious preference, and those with no religious preference make up the categories. For the multivariate analysis I break down each category into a dummy variable.

Defining evangelical Protestants has proved to be difficult (Woodbury and Smith 1998; Hackett and Lindasy 2008). Methods of measurement that include either denomination, self-identification, or beliefs by themselves can provide samples of evangelicals that are all quite different from one another. Following Woodbury and Smith (2008), I use a combination of denomination and beliefs to provide a more comprehensive measurement of evangelicals. In this study, evangelicals are defined as those identifying as a Protestant and those conforming to certain tenets that are central to evangelicalism. Therefore, those who identify as Protestant and report to have had a "born-again" experience and have encouraged others to "accept Jesus Christ as their lord and personal savior" are considered evangelicals.

Controls. I also introduce several controls in the ordered logistic model including race, marital status, gender, and educational attainment (measured by degree attainment), and political party affiliation.

Section 2: Robert Wuthnow's Forgiveness Survey

The Forgiveness Survey is cross-sectional and uses a nationally representative sample of members of small groups. The sample for this survey was selected using random digit dialing and respondents were interviewed over the phone. The respondents

were screened based on whether or not they answered "Yes" to either of these two questions: "Do you attend any prayer group meetings or Bible study groups?" and "Are you involved in any other small groups, such as self-help group, support group, men's or women's group, or Sunday school class?" By answering yes to either of these questions the respondent demonstrates that they are part of a small group. Approximately 93 percent or 1,379 respondents answered yes to one or both of these questions and completed the interview over the phone (Wuthnow 2000, 129). Next, the respondents were asked to choose from a list of descriptions that applied to their group. Ninety percent of the respondents were members of groups that "had some religious content" (Wuthnow 2000, 130).

Measures from the Forgiveness Survey

Forgiving behaviors. I measure forgiving behaviors based on this question: "Has the group ever helped you, personally, in any of the following ways... helped you to forgive someone?" The response categories for this question are 0 = no and 1 = yes. Following McCullough and Worthington Jr (1999), this question is transgression-specific in that it asks about specific events in the respondents' lives where a transgression occurred. Asking respondents about specific instances of forgiveness in their lives makes respondents more likely to respond in ways that reflect their actual behavior.

Age. In the multivariate models age is used as a continuous variable. As with the GSS, in the bivariate analyses I break age down into categories meant to represent certain life transitions: those less than twenty-five years old (adolescence), those between twenty-five and thirty-four (early adulthood), thirty-five to forty-four (adulthood), forty-

five to fifty-four (early late-adulthood), fifty-five to sixty-four (late adulthood), sixty-five and older (retirement/elderly).

Religiosity. Religiosity is measured using three variables: church attendance, importance of religion respondent's life, and religious identification. Church attendance specifically asks "How often, if at all, do you attend religious services?" Response categories: 7 = More than once a week; 6 = About once a week; 5 = Several times a month; 4 = About once a month; 3 = Several times a year; 2 = Once a year or less; 1 = Never. As with the GSS, measures of church attendance are subject to increased social desirability and should be seen as a more general measure of religiosity as opposed to actual rates of church attendance.

I use two variables to measure the importance of religion in a respondent's life: current importance, and importance to family while growing up. Current importance is measured using the question "How important would you say religion is in your own life?" and importance as a child is measured using "How important would you say religion was in your family while you were growing up?" Response categories: I = Very important; 2 Somewhat important; 3 Not very important.

I measure religious identification using responses to a religious preference question that categorized respondents into 16 different religious groups including those who admit no religious preference. From the 16 groups, I created a variable where evangelicals, other Protestants, Catholics, respondents with any "other" religious preference, and those with no religious preference make up the categories. For the multivariate analysis I break down each category into a dummy variable.

Falling out. A measure of whether or not a respondent was put in a situation to forgive another was also included in the analysis. I include this measure in the analysis to control for having an opportunity to forgive. It may be that members of certain groups are more likely to be in situations where forgiving another is necessary, making it especially important to control for this factor in the analyses. Falling out was measured by combining three dichotomous variables all beginning with "During the past year have you experienced any of the following." "A falling out with a friend or neighbor?" "A strained relationship with a child, parent, or other relative?" And "Conflict with your spouse or partner?" Answering yes to either of these questions could potentially put a respondent in a situation where forgiving behaviors could occur. These three measures were combined to create one comprehensive variable measuring if a respondent had a chance to forgive.

Controls. I also introduce several controls into the logistic model including: marital status, gender, educational attainment, and race.

Summary of Survey Data Methods

In summary, I use two surveys in this study to measure two different, but related, concepts. The 1998 GSS is used to measure a nationally representative population's attitudes toward forgiving others. The Robert Wuthnow's Forgiveness Survey is used to measure religious group members' forgiving behaviors. In both surveys respondents' age and religiosity are focused on specifically to test differences in forgiving attitudes and behaviors. Other demographic factors are used as controls.

Section 3: In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interview data for this project were collected from ten church-going individuals in the New England area. All interviewees attend New England Church (NEC), an Evangelical church located in a New England county that is part of the Boston metropolitan area. The county has a population of roughly 120,000 people and is mostly non-Hispanic white (95%). The county has a lower median age (about 36) than New England as a whole (about 40). This is likely due to the university located within the county. Large numbers of university students means a large number of people in their twenties. This would likely lower the median age of the county. NEEC is located approximately one mile from that university.

Individuals over the age of fifty-five were deliberately chosen to take part in the interviews. Older individuals are more likely to have the life experience to have multiple instances where forgiving another was possible. Also, they were likely to experience changes in their own attitudes toward forgiveness overtime and recount them during the interviews. Also, the literature on both forgiving behaviors and religious involvement has shown that older individuals are more likely than others to be religiously involved and to engage in forgiving behaviors (Dillon and Wink 2007; Toussaint et al. 2001). This makes older individuals an ideal choice for this research project.

Evangelicals were also purposefully chosen to take part in these interviews. Numerous studies have demonstrated that evangelical churches are characterized by members who are highly committed and generally score highest on most measures of religiosity like church attendance, beliefs, and importance of religion in one's life (see Smith 1998; Warner 1988). Therefore, limiting my pool of possible interviewees to

evangelicals allows me to control for religiosity. As most previous research has emphasized changes in forgiving attitudes and behaviors amongst the elderly and those with the highest levels of religiosity, it makes sense to control for these variables in my interviews.

All interviewees were approached after Sunday church service while in the lobby of the church on their way out. When the individual agreed to an interview a time was scheduled (usually after Sunday church services in a private room of the church) to meet for the interview. All interviewees were asked basic questions about church attendance, tenure at their current church, past religious involvement, general questions about forgiveness, and basic demographic questions. Other than this, interviews were generally unstructured and interviewees were encouraged to talk at length about their personal experiences of forgiving others. All interviews were recorded to keep note taking to a minimum. This allowed a conversational atmosphere to emerge between interviewees and myself.

Lastly, interviewees were not randomly selected and are not meant to be representative of the population as a whole. Instead, the in-depth interview data is primarily meant to provide means for understanding the findings from the survey analysis. Secondarily, general themes from the interviews will be analyzed in light of the findings from the survey data.

Table 1. Individual Characteristics of Interviewees

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Tenure at NEC (years)	Divorce	How often at church	Number of Children
1998 GSS[1]	50.7[2]	61	NA	18[3]	52[4]	3
Thomas	Male	59	10	No	Weekly	2
Bill	Male	58	2	No	Most weeks	3
Harold	Male	57	3	Yes	Weekly	2
Jeremy	Male	66	13	Yes	Weekly	0
Sean	Male	62	15	No	Weekly	2
Michael	Male	58	15	No	Weekly	4
Luke	Male	66	8	No	Most weeks	2
Shirley	Female	56	6	Yes	Weekly	3
Alice	Female	58	2	No	Most weeks	1
Abigail	Female	63	3	No	Weekly	2

[1]n = 40
[2]Percent male
[3]Percent divorced
[4]Percent weekly or more

Individual characteristics of each interviewee along with comparisons to Evangelicals of the same age group in the GSS can be found in Table 1. In all, seven of the ten interviewees are male compared to about 51 percent of Evangelicals in the same age group from the GSS. All interviewees are over the age of 55, most report being members of New England Church for more than five years, and all report being members of a different church before they began going to NEC. Three of the ten interviewees (two male and one female) report going through a divorce with the last twenty years compared to about 18 percent of Evangelicals from the GSS. All report attending church services at least most of the weeks in a month with seven of ten reporting to attend church services weekly, a slightly higher percentage than GSS respondents.

Summary of In-Depth Interview Methods

In summary, the interviewees recruited for the interviews were purposefully selected for their age and levels of religiosity. All interviewees were recruited from a single Evangelical church in New England and are over the age of 55. I will use the in-depth interview data to provide context and understanding to findings from the survey data. Lastly, interviewees are not meant to be representative of any population, however, several themes from the interviews will be presented and discussed.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS FROM TWO SURVEYS

Analytical plan

I begin the data analysis with general descriptive findings from each survey. I primarily focus on findings concerning age and measures of religiosity along with differences between respondent's in the two surveys. Next, relationships between measures of religiosity, age, and forgiveness variables are tested. Chi-square tests are conducted for significance. Lastly, I summarize the findings placing special focus the hypotheses proposed in the methods section.

Descriptive Findings from the GSS

Table 2 contains responses to the main variables described in the methods section and general demographic characteristics of GSS respondents. Generally speaking, adults in the United States value the forgiving of others. In the GSS, a majority (86 percent) of respondents report always forgiving those who hurt them, compared to only about 14 percent who say they seldom or never forgive those who hurt them. The GSS respondents' attitudes toward forgiving others reflect the influence of Christianity on the United States.

Table 2. Demographics of GSS Respondents (weighted percent)

	GSS[1]
Focal Variables	
Forgiving attitudes	
Forgive those who hurt you?	
Always	48
Often	38
Seldom	10
Never	4
Age category	
Less than 25	11
25 to 34	22
35 to 44	24
45 to 54	18
55 to 64	11
More than 64	15
How often attend religious services?	
Once a week or more	26
Once a week or more as child	19
How religious are you?	
Very religious	19
Moderately religious	43
Slightly religious	24
Not religious	15
Religious identification	
Evangelical Protestant	12
Other Protestant	41
Catholic	26
Other	8
No preference	14
Control Variables	
NH White (white for GSS)	79
Female	55
Education	
Less than high school	16
High school graduate	53
Some college	8
College graduate	16
More than college degree	8
Marital status	
Single/ never married	25
Married	47
Separated	3
Divorced	15
Widowed	10
N	1417

As shown in Table 3, the age categories do not have a significant effect on a person's attitudes toward forgiving others. While those aged 65 and older appear to be the most likely to says they always forgive and least to say they never forgive those who hurt them, differences between age groups are not significantly different from zero. An ordered logit regression using age (in years) to predict how often a respondent forgives others, however, reveals that there is some linear relationship between a respondent's age and their attitudes toward forgiving others (see Appendix A). This test reveals a significant positive association between age and attitudes toward forgiving others. In other words, older individuals are more likely than younger ones to report always forgiving those who hurt them. Differences between these two tests are likely due to the data lost by truncating age into categories for analysis.

Table 3. Bivariate association between GSS age categories and attitudes toward forgiving others (weighted)

	Always Forgive	Often Forgive	Seldom Forgive	Never Forgive	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Significant
Age (category)					ns
Less than 25	43.7	39.9	9.1	7.2	
25 to 34	41.3	41.1	12.6	5.1	
35 to 44	48.4	40.0	7.9	3.7	
45 to 54	47.4	41.4	7.9	3.3	
55 to 64	53.1	34.3	6.9	5.6	
More than 64	54.5	31.1	11.6	2.8	

ns = not significant * p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

The GSS also provides data on religiosity that can be generalized to the United States population as a whole (Table 2). Regarding church attendance, about 26 percent of GSS respondents report attending church services weekly or more. At 19 percent, fewer respondents report going to church weekly or more as a child than they do currently.

Furthermore, 62 percent of respondents report being moderately or very religious compared to 38 percent reporting to be only slightly religious or not religious at all. Concerning church attendance, about twice as many people report being Protestant (53 percent) than Catholic (26 percent) compared to about 14 percent who don't identify with any religious group.

Table 4. Bivariate associations between GSS measures of religiosity and attitudes toward forgiving others

	Always Forgive	Often Forgive	Seldom Forgive	Never Forgive	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	
Religious identification					***
Evangelical Protestant	65.7	28.7	4.6	1.0	
Other Protestant	45.2	39.4	11.8	3.7	
Catholic	43.7	40.8	10.7	4.8	
Other	44.6	44.1	4.3	7.0	
None	28.9	46.8	14.0	10.3	
Church attendance					***
Once a week or more	66.7	27.4	4.9	10.4	
Less than once a week	40.9	42.4	11.3	5.6	
Church attendance as child					***
Once a week or more	54.7	32.2	9.9	3.3	
Less than once a week	43.4	42.3	9.3	5.0	
Religious strength					***
Very religious	70.4	23.6	3.9	2.1	
Moderately religious	52.2	37.8	7.6	2.4	
Slightly religious	35.0	43.6	15.5	5.9	
Not religious	24.9	51.3	12.8	11.0	

ns = not significant * p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

As Table 4 demonstrates, each measure of religiosity is associated with attitudes toward forgiving others. Evangelicals appear to be the most likely to report always forgiving those who hurt them at about 66 percent. About the same percentage of other Protestants, Catholics, and those with a different religious preference report always forgiving at about 45, 44, and 45 percent respectively. The least likely to report always

forgiving those who hurt them are those with no religious preference. Those with no preference are also most likely to report never forgiving those who hurt them. The "nones" are not unforgiving, however, as almost 47 percent report often forgiving those who hurt them, the highest of all religious groups to do so.

Church attendance is also a correlated with attitudes toward forgiving others. Two-thirds of those who attend church weekly or more report always forgiving those who hurt them compared to only 41 percent of those attending church less frequently. Interestingly, those attending church weekly or more are also more likely than others to report never forgiving those who hurt them. Similar findings are true of church attendance as a child. Those who grew up attending church weekly are more likely than others to report always forgiving those who hurt them. As with religious identification, however, those who attend church services less than once a week are not unforgiving as about 42 percent report often forgiving those who hurt them. Indeed, while 87 percent of those attending church weekly or more report forgiving others always or often, 86 percent of those attending church less frequently report the same. The main differences seem to be between the "often" and the "always" forgivers.

A similar story emerges for the relationship between religious strength and attitudes toward forgiving others. Those reporting to be very religious (70 percent) are more likely than others to report always forgiving those who hurt them. The slightly and not religious appear to be the least likely to forgive others. While 79 and 76 percent of the slightly and not religious report always or often forgiving others, 90 and 94 percent of their moderately and very religious counterparts report the same.

Descriptive Findings from the Forgiveness Survey

Table 5 contains responses to the main variables described in the methods section and general demographic characteristics of Forgiveness Survey respondents. As I mentioned in the methods section, respondents of the Forgiveness Survey are meant to represent a different population than those of the GSS. While the GSS is representative of the United States as a whole, the Forgiveness Survey is meant to represent members of small religious groups. As such, we expect to see differences in the demographics between surveys.

Generally speaking, Forgiveness Survey respondents have engaged in forgiving behaviors. More specifically, approximately 61 percent of the respondents report that their religious group has helped them forgive another. While not necessarily comparable, this 61 percent is somewhat higher than the 48 percent who report always forgiving those who hurt them from the GSS (Table 2).

Table 5. Demographics of Forgiveness Survey Respondents

	Forgiveness Survey
Focal Variables	
Forgiving behaviors	
Group helped forgive?	61.1
Age category	
Less than 25	7.4
25 to 34	16.1
35 to 44	23.9
45 to 54	21.0
55 to 64	11.7
More than 64	19.9
How often attend religious services?	
Once a week or more	70.2
Importance of religion in life	
Very important now	86.2
Very inportant to family growing up	64.8
Religious identification	
Evangelical Protestant	5.3
Other Protetant	53.7
Catholic	15.7
Other	21.1
No preference	4.2
Falling out in past year?	47.5
Control Variables	
NH White (white for GSS)	77.5
Female	61.8
Education	
Less than high school	7.5
High school graduate	20.2
Some college	30.5
College graduate	24.8
More than college degree	17.0
Marital status	
Single/ never married	15.7
Married	60.3
Separated	1.9
Divorced	9.5
Widowed	10.8
N	1379

Age categories are distributed similarly between the GSS and the Forgiveness Survey with the Forgiveness Survey population appears to be slightly older. As Table 6 demonstrates, respondents' age is correlated with engaging in a forgiving behavior. Those under 25, at about 76 percent, are most likely to say the small group they belong to has helped them forgive another. At 51 percent, those over 65 years old are the least likely to acknowledge the role of their group in forgiving another. This finding runs opposite to findings from the GSS where older individuals were more likely than younger ones to report always forgiving.

By only choosing members of religious groups, the Forgiveness Survey respondents will have higher levels of religiosity than GSS respondents. Indeed, 4 percent of Forgiveness Survey respondents compared to 14 percent of the general population report no religious preference. Fewer people with no religious preference might account for the lack of a significant effect between religious identification and engaging in the forgiving behavior. With fewer respondents not falling under the general umbrella of Christianity, there is likely less variation in beliefs between individuals.

As with religious identification, differences emerge between the GSS and Forgiveness Survey on levels of church attendance. Approximately 70 percent of Forgiveness Survey respondents report attending church services weekly or more (Table 5). This is much higher than the 26 percent reporting to attend church weekly from the general population (Table 2). Like the GSS, however, frequency of church attendance amongst Forgiveness Survey respondents is associated forgiving another. Almost two-thirds of those who report attending church services weekly or more also report that their

small group has helped them forgive another compared to 55 percent attending church less frequently.

Table 6. Bivariate Associations Between Main Independent Variables and Forgiving Behaviors

	Group Helped Forgive	
	Percent	Sig
Age (category)		***
Less than 25	77.5	
25 to 34	61.3	
35 to 44	66.7	
45 to 54	61.3	
55 to 64	55.9	
More than 64	50.9	
Religious Identification		ns
Evangelical	63.4	
Other Protestant	60.4	
Catholic	59.7	
Other	65.9	
No preference	52.6	
Church attendance		**
Once a week or more	63.7	
Less than once a week	54.7	
Important religion (now)		***
Very important	62.8	
Not very important	50.0	
Important religion (growing up)		ns
Very important	60.9	
Not very important	61.4	
Falling out		***
Yes	69.3	
No	53.6	

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

Religion is important to Forgiveness Survey respondents. An overwhelming 86 percent report that religion is very important to them now, while 65 percent report that religion was very important in their family while growing up. Importance of religion is also related to engaging in a forgiving behavior. Almost two-thirds of those reporting

that religion is very important to their lives also report that their small group has helped them forgive another compared to 50 percent reporting that religion is less important to their lives. How important religion was to the respondents' families while growing up is not a significant predictor of engaging in the forgiving behavior.

In summary, from the GSS each of the main independent variables is associated with attitudes toward forgiving others. Older respondents, Evangelicals, those who attend church once a week or more, those who attended church once a week or more as a child, and those who report to be very religious are significantly more likely than others to report always forgiving those who have hurt them. Younger respondents, those with no religious preference, attend church less, and report to be less religious are the least likely to report always forgiving. However, this group is not necessarily unforgiving, as many report often forgiving those who hurt as opposed to always forgiving. These findings provide partial support for Hypotheses 1 and 2 that those with high religiosity, along with those who are older, would be most likely to hold positive attitudes toward forgiving others.

Regarding the Forgiveness Survey, most of the main independent variables are associated with engaging in a forgiving behavior. Age is related to having reported forgiving another, but not in the direction hypothesized (Hypothesis 3). The oldest respondents are least likely to have engaged in a forgiving behavior. Those attending church most frequently and those claiming that religion is very important to them are more likely than others to report having forgiven someone as a result of their group membership. Religious identification, however, is not a significant predictor of forgiving someone. This provides only partial support for Hypothesis 4: that Christians and those

with high levels of religious involvement will be more likely than others to forgive another. Lastly, those who had a falling out with a partner, a relative, or a neighbor were more likely than others to have reported forgiving another. Next, these associations will be tested using ordered logit and logit regression in order to test for spuriousness and to see what combination of variables best predicts forgiving attitudes and behaviors.

CHAPTER IV

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS FROM TWO SURVEYS WITH ADDED CONTEXT FROM IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

My main goal in this chapter is to test the bivariate associations presented in Chapter III using ordered and logit regression to control for background variables. I begin this chapter with the GSS paying particular attention to associations between age, religiosity, and attitudes toward forgiving others. Next, I use the Forgiveness Survey to look at the relationships between age, religiosity, and engaging in a forgiving behavior. Throughout the analysis, I use data from the in-depth interviews to provide context and explanation for relevant findings.

Multivariate Analyses from the GSS

Table 7 presents a weighted ordered-logit regression predicting attitudes toward forgiving others. Relationships presented here should be considered the net effect of each measure when taking other variables in the model into account. For example, in Table 7, the effect of age is 1.000 even after considering the separate effects of all other variables in the model. Looking at Table 7, it is evident that when controlling for other variables, the positive association between respondents' age and attitudes toward forgiving others disappears. Older respondents are no more likely than younger respondents to report always forgiving others who hurt them.

Table 7. Weighted ordered logistic regression predicting attitudes toward forgiving others

	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	p>t
Age (years)	1.000	0.003	
Religious identification			
Evangelical	1.890	0.637	**
Other Protestant	1.160	0.146	
Catholic	1.030	0.028	
Other	1.090	0.085	
Weekly church attendance	1.680	0.518	***
Weekly church attendance as child	1.100	0.098	
Strength of religious involvement	1.550	0.436	***
Male	1.120	0.117	
Married	1.020	0.017	
White	1.050	0.050	
Education (by degree)	1.040	0.036	
Republican	0.840	-0.171	
Independent	0.820	-0.202	
cut1		-1.413	***
cut2		-0.115	
cut3		1.976	***
Pseudo r-square	.058		
F	11.1		
N	1405		

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

Note: To avoid problems associated with including republicans and evangelicals in the same model this model was also run without political party affiliation and had no effect on any religious identification variables

Through statistical analysis, it remains unclear whether the relationship between age and forgiving attitudes is a cohort effect (the effect of the generation or cultural context that one was born in) or an effect of aging, or getting older, in general. Furthermore, the relationship seems to disappear when taking other variables into account. In other words, are the age differences described above a result of different sets of experiences for people born in different generations or does getting older lead individual's to value forgiving? Or is there another explanation that accounts for the perceived effect of age in bivariate analyses? Without data that expands across multiple

years, it is almost impossible to answer this question. Longitudinal data of this type would allow for observations of people's attitudes toward forgiving others and how they have changed across different time periods. In-depth interview data, however, does provide some possible answers. Consider Bill, a 58-year-old male that has been attending church services at NEC regularly for two years provides some insight. "I don't think forgiving people is something I learned from church. Certainly... the church group here has made it clear how important forgiving is, but I think forgiving is also one of those things that you learn as you get older... it's something we learn through experience." In Bill's case, experience is the main cause he attributes to his attitudes about forgiving others. Others shared a similar sentiment as Abigail, Luke, Michael, and Sean all mentioned that their attitudes toward forgiving are related to personal experiences that they have had in the past. Others were less explicit about the role of time in forming their forgiving attitudes. For instance, Jeremy, a 66-year-old male who has attended church services regularly at NEC for 13 years described his attitudes about forgiving others as something he learned by being a Christian. He notes, "I wouldn't think about forgiving the same way if I weren't Christian. You have to know Jesus Christ... You have to understand his forgiveness before you can understand forgiving another person." For Jeremy, it's not just aging, but aging within the values and norms of the Christian church that has formed his attitudes toward forgiving. While all of the interviewees are part of the same cohort, there explanations provide some support for the argument that attitudes toward forgiving are an effect of aging rather than cohort.

Table 7 also shows the effect of religious identification on respondents' attitudes toward forgiving others. Compared to those with no religious preference (who were least

likely to report forgiving others in the bivariate analysis), only Evangelicals are more likely to report always forgiving others. Other Protestants, Catholics, and those with any other religious preference are no more likely than those with no preference to report always forgive others with controlling for other factors. If one falls into the evangelical category, the odds of reporting to always forgive those who hurt them increase by 89 percent compared to those with no religious preference.

Church attendance is also related to attitudes toward forgiving others. Those who attend church most frequently are significantly more likely than others to report always forgiving those who hurt them. More specifically, if a respondent reports weekly church attendance their odds of saying they always forgive others increase by 68 percent. Strength of religious involvement also retains its significant affect on attitudes toward forgiving in the multivariate analyses. Those who self-report to be more religious are less likely than the less religious to report always forgiving others. Weekly church as a child, however, lost its significant effect when controlling for other variables. It's likely that the other measures of religiosity are better predictors of attitudes toward forgiving.

Each of the interviewees in this analysis share high levels of church attendance and report that religion is very important to them. Keeping the findings from the multivariate analysis in mind, one would expect the interviewees to also share positive attitudes toward forgiving others. For the most part, this is true. Consider Bill and Jeremy (quoted above), who had slightly differing opinions on where their attitudes toward forgiving others came from. Bill and Jeremy both recognize that their frequent religious involvement has influenced their attitudes toward forgiving others. Furthermore, they

both mention that Christianity in general has played a large part in their understandings of forgiving.

In contrast, interview data also provides a possible explanation for why identifying as a Christian was not a significant predictor of forgiving attitudes when controlling for other religious and background variables. When asked about forgiveness in general, each of the interviewees reported that forgiving others was an important aspect of their lives. For instance, Sean, a 66-year-old man who attends church weekly, noted

> In most situations I like to think I would forgive someone who has done wrong to me. It's important religiously, to be forgiving. Each week we hear about the importance of forgiveness... the importance of God's forgiveness and forgiving others. In my faith, forgiveness has an important role... it has an important place in being a Christian. I believe it to be true... and I like to be more forgiving in my life.

For Sean, being a Christian is related to forgiving others. Not all interviewees, however, were as confident in the role that Christianity played in forming their attitudes toward forgiveness in their own lives. Recall Bill, from above, who was not sure about the separate roles that religious involvement and life experience played in the formation of his ideas about forgiving. While it is true that some respondents, like Bill, did not see a clear path between their religious involvement and their attitudes toward forgiveness, all of the respondents noted that forgiving others was a value that is very important to them.

Multivariate Analyses from the Forgiveness Survey

Table 8 presents findings from the logistic regression analyses predicting responses to the measure of forgiving behaviors. Respondent's age remains a significant predictor of forgiving another person. This finding holds true even after controlling for religiosity, whether or not the respondent had a falling out with someone in the past year,

and other background measures, including race, gender, marital status, and educational attainment. As with the bivariate analysis, younger respondents are the most likely to report their group helped them forgive another. More specifically, for each increase in age (year) the odds of a respondent reporting to have forgiven another decrease by 2 percent. This means that the oldest Forgiveness Survey respondents are the least likely to report engaging in forgiving behavior.

Table 8. Logistic Regression Predicting Forgiving Behaviors

	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	p>z
Age (years)	0.980	-0.019	***
Religious identification			
Evangelical	1.200	0.182	
Protestant	1.330	0.287	
Catholic	1.260	0.233	
Other	1.640	0.494	
Weekly church attendance	1.350	0.303	*
Religion very important (life)	1.660	0.506	***
Religion very important (growing up)	0.900	-0.104	
Male	1.170	0.157	
Married	0.960	-0.036	
White	0.710	-0.341	*
Education (by degree)	0.930	-0.068	
_cons		0.951	**
Pseudo r-square	0.037		
t	66.41		
N	1,341		

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

In the bivariate analyses, there was not a significant relationship between religious identification and engaging in a forgiving behavior. This finding remains when controlling for other variables. No specific religious group is more likely than those with no preference to report forgiving another. In contrast, those who attend church once a week or more were significantly more likely than others to report that their group helped

them forgive another. After controlling for other variables, multivariate analyses reveal that church attendance remains a significant predictor. For those who report to attend church weekly, the odds of reporting to have forgiven another increase by 35 percent.

Also, whether or not a person reports that religion is very important in their life retains its significance. The odds of reporting to have forgiven another increase by 66 percent for those reporting that religion is very important to compared to those who don't find religion to be as important. The importance of religion in one's family while growing remains a not significant predictor of engaging in a forgiving behavior in these multivariate analyses.

Interview data provides context and understanding for many of the findings related to forgiving behaviors. Many interviewees, uncertain about what to attribute their past instances of forgiveness to, many interviewees spoke of the passage of time as what healed their strained relationships. For instance, Harold, a fifty-seven year old man who has been attending NEC weekly for the past three years noted: "When I lost trust in [my son] it took me a long time to get over it. I wasn't... sure I would be able to ever trust him again. But... after a few months had passed... the pain... sort of just went away and I was able to forgive him." When probed about the role that religion had in forgiving his son Harold replied: "I don't think my religion was directly related to forgiving my son. We were going to a different church back then. Religion wasn't as big a part of our lives as it is now. I think it was more of just umm the passing of time... or the letting go of anger that helped me forgive [my son]." Harold's response about the passing of time wasn't unusual. During the course of the interviews Jeremy, Sean, Luke, and Abigail

each mentioned the passing of time, or time healing wounds in response to questions asking why they were able to forgive.

Interviewees were also prompted to discuss any differences they saw in the way they went about forgiving others in their past versus how they go about it now. Responses were mixed, however. Every interviewee remarked that the way they go about forgiving others has changed dramatically since early adulthood. Sean, a sixty-two-year-old male who has been attending NEC weekly for fifteen years gave a response that was common to many of the other interviewees.

> When I was a kid I would hold a lot of grudges... I could be mad at anyone over any little thing. I was arrogant a little and was always right. I was always right, no one could convince me otherwise.... Now I'm less likely to... I'm less confrontational with people and I think I understand people a little better. I don't see everything as an attack... I don't see everyone as attacking me.

Many interviewees shared similar sentiments to Sean's. As young adults they were more reactionary and had more confrontations. In their later years they began seeing relationships and conflicts in different ways.

While most interviewees did not specifically mention their religiosity when asked why they were able to forgive someone in their past, when prompted many did acknowledge the fact that their religious upbringings probably had an influence on their behavior. For instance, Abigail, a sixty-three year old female with two children noted: "Oh I think the church did help me forgive my mother. The Sundays at church became a time where I would sit and pray for my mother. I think that is what helped me get to the point where I could forgive her...."

That fact that most respondents had to be prompted about their religious involvement before mentioning it as an influence in their forgiveness sheds light on the

finding that Christians aren't more likely than non-Christians to engage in forgiving behaviors. Since most interviewees thought that that the passage of time, rather than their religious involvement healed their harmed relationships, it is possible that learning how to forgive another comes from sources other than the church to which a person belongs.

Summary of Multivariate Survey Analysis

In summary, the findings from the GSS paint a portrait of American's general attitudes toward forgiving others. The analyses described above do not provide evidence for Hypothesis 1, i.e., that respondent's age is positively associated with attitudes toward forgiving others. After controlling for religious involvement and background factors, respondent's age lost its significant effect on predicting attitudes toward forgiving others. In-depth data somewhat contradicted this finding as most interviewees noted that forgiving others was a value learned through a lifetime of experience. Some interviewees were more specific noting that not just life experience, but experiencing the values of the Christian church for a prolonged period of time had the largest impact on their own attitudes toward forgiving. Hypothesis 2, i.e., that individuals identifying as Christian and those with high levels of religious involvement would be more likely than others to have positive attitudes toward forgiving others was partially confirmed. Individuals who attend church most frequently are more likely to have positive attitudes toward forgiving than others. Only certain Christians, evangelicals, were more likely than those with no preference to report always forgiving others who hurt them.

Statistical findings from the Forgiveness Survey do not support Hypothesis 3, i.e., that older individuals will be more likely than younger people to have engaged in forgiving behaviors. Older individuals were significantly less likely than younger ones to

report forgiving another. In-depth interviews provided some possible explanation for this finding. Many of the interviewees noted large changes in the way they go about forgiving others now compared to when they were younger. Hypothesis 4, i.e., that those with high levels of religiosity would be more likely than others to engage in forgiving behaviors was partially confirmed. Church attendance and importance of religion remained significant predictors of forgiving behaviors, while identification as a Christian, even after breaking Christian up into several distinct groups, and the importance of religion to one's family while growing up were not significant when controlling for other factors. Interviewees provided partial explanation for this finding, as most respondents did not specifically mention their church membership as a reason for their forgiving until prompted by my question "Did the people at church, or the church itself, help you forgive?"

Insight from the Interviews

In my analysis of interviews with individuals from NEC, several themes presented themselves. Interviewees were asked to discuss several instances where they were able to forgive another and when they weren't able to forgive. The themes discussed in this section all fall under the general category of "Changes in Attitudes and Behaviors over the Life Course," in that most respondents noted a change in how they forgave across their lives. It is also interesting to note that my interviewees made several references to politics when talking about forgiving others. Below, each of the themes, along with examples from interviews, are discussed in detail.

Inability to Forgive

When asked about how their opinions and instances of forgiving others have changed over their life course, most interviewees usually began by talking about instances where they were unable to forgive others in the past. This can be divided into two sub themes: stubbornness and the unforgiveable. Instances of stubbornness were common among the people I interviewed. Most of these examples given by interviewees included some mention of their young adulthood where they just refused to forgive someone, usually for a reason they deemed as petty. When asked about forgiving others in the past, Shirley, a fifty-six-year-old mother of three who has been attending church services regularly at NEC for the past 6 years noted that she "...was so stubborn when I was a kid! I could hold a grudge forever..." Likewise, Sean, as quoted in a section above, had similar feelings about his stubborn nature as a young adult.

Many interviewees had similar memories of their pasts, but not all mentioned stubbornness. Others, like Harold, a 57-year-old father who has been attending church services regularly at NEC for 3 years mentioned, "some things... some things you just can't forgive. I know that Jesus preaches to forgive everyone... but sometimes you can't." Thomas, Bill, and Abigail all shared a similar sentiment to Harold's. Being unforgiving is different from being stubborn in that many instances where people felt unforgiving towards another were of a more "serious" nature. Thomas explains this best, "Some things are just unforgiveable.... They happen, and you move on you know? It can't, things just won't be the same so you have to move on."

Another distinction can be made between these two types of inability to forgive. Respondents who talked about their stubbornness were talking about instances in young

adulthood and how they have changed since then. Most interviewees describing their stubbornness preface their responses with "when I was a kid" or something similar. These respondents noted that more recent instances of forgiving others are marked by a more thoughtful and understanding process. When talking about more current instances of forgiving others, many respondents either spoke about unforgiveable actions, what it means to forgive, and unconditional forgiveness.

Moving On Does Not Always Equal Forgiving

An interesting point from Thomas' last quote is that he did not see moving on as forgiving another. For Thomas, and several others, forgiving another required that some kind of reconciliation must occur between to the transgressor and the victim. For instance, Abigail notes, "when someone hurts me, I want them to understand what they did wrong and try to resolve it." In this instance, the transgressor must come to some kind of realization that they did something wrong and make an effort to resolve the conflict before forgiveness can occur. Others, like Bill, disagreed, "Forgiveness is a personal process.... It's something that happens inside you. When your... negative feelings are gone, then you've forgiven." For Bill, forgiveness does not require an effort by the transgressor to reconcile. Rather, forgiving another is a "personal process" that occurs when emotions have dissipated.

Unconditional forgiveness

Questions about what actually constitutes forgiving another usually developed into interviewees discussing unconditional forgiveness. Each interviewee, when asked about the role religion plays in their forgiving of others mentioned something about the church preaching unconditional forgiveness. Abigail, for example, when asked about how

her involvement at NEC has changed her attitudes toward forgiving others said, "Oh, the Bible says to always forgive those who hurt us… 'forgive those who trespass against us.'" Abigail goes on to mention how difficult that can be in practice, "it's hard… because when you're hurt, you want the other person to apologize, it's hard to always forgive those who hurt you. But it's a process, no one is perfect. Forgiving others is something we could all work on." Others mentioned how difficult unconditional forgiveness was in practice for reasons such as the fact that, "emotions are too high" and "not everyone wants to be forgiven." These experiences were often between individuals with very close emotional relationships like spouses, parents and their children, and good friends who couldn't seem to come to an agreement.

Forgiving and Politics

Interviewees spoke in-depth about how they forgave others and what it means to forgive. All spoke about how their instances of forgiveness have changed across their lives noting that their once stubborn nature has receded into a more thoughtful one. Interestingly, several interviewees mentioned how their contemporary attitudes toward forgiving others have caused them to view politics in a different way. Consider both Harold and Shirley, self-described republicans who regularly attend church services at NEC. Without being prompted, Harold noted, "I've become more forgiving when it comes to politics too. With all the scandals we have today, it's hard to trust anyone in politics, you know? You have to… umm you have to realize that people, all people, make mistakes… and you have to forgive them or there'd be no one in politics (laughs)." Likewise, Shirley mentioned, "If you can't forgive someone else there wouldn't be anyone to trust! Just look at the politicians these days."

The comments of Shirley and Harold struck a chord with me as a researcher. I had gone into this project focusing solely on the religious aspects of forgiving others without thinking how forgiving might be related to politics in general. After listening to Shirley and Harold, I went back to the GSS to see if politics had an effect on people's attitudes toward forgiving others. Table 9 shows the relationship between political party affiliation in the GSS survey and attitudes toward forgiving others, among those in the same age group as the interviewees. Political party does have a significant effect on respondents' attitudes toward forgiving others. Republicans, followed closely by Democrats, are the most likely to report always forgiving those who hurt them. Independents are the least likely to report always forgiving and the most likely to report never forgiving others.

Table 9. Bivariate association between GSS political party and attitudes toward forgiving others, amongst those aged 56 to 67

	Always Forgive	Often Forgive	Seldom Forgive	Never Forgive	
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Significant
Political party					*
Democrat	50.0	41.6	6.2	2.4	
Independent	26.3	44.7	10.5	18.4	
Republican	58.4	28.3	10.6	2.7	

ns = not significant * p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

It is possible that those not identifying as either Republican or Democrat are also less likely to be involved with a religious group and, therefore, be less likely to value the forgiving of others. If you recall from Table 7, political party does not remain a significant predictor of attitudes toward forgiving others when other variables are taken into account. This does not mean, however, that people's attitudes toward forgiving others do not lead them to look at politics in different ways. Interview data provides some understanding for this problem. For Harold and Shirley, above and beyond any effects

that can be measured statistically, their attitudes toward forgiving others have shaped the way they view politics in the United States.

Summary of Interviews

Interviewees spoke at length about what it means to forgive others highlighting instances where they were able and unable to forgive. Each interviewee also mentioned how their experiences and attitudes toward forgiving others have changed throughout their lives. When asked about what constitutes forgiveness, all of the interviewees mentioned how their religious involvement tells them that unconditional forgiveness is what they should practice in their lives. But most also noted how hard that was in actual practice and how they usually can't unconditionally forgive. Finally, some interviewees also made specific references to politics when talking about forgiving others while noting how important forgiving others is in reference to political figureheads.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In contemporary American society, personal interactions can be broadcast to and analyzed by society at a rapid rate. As a result, many transgressions that could once be swept under the rug are now on display for everyone to see. This is especially true of those in the political realm, leading many United States citizens to demand certain reconciliatory actions be met before forgiving those who have done wrong. And as Harold and Shirley demonstrated in the previous section, people's attitudes toward forgiving others can influence their opinions of political figures.

Forgiveness also matters on an interpersonal level. Many scholars have noted the influence of Christianity on American society. With this comes the influence of Christian values. One such value is to forgive others when they do harm to you. As a result, forgiving others in the United States (as in many other Western countries) takes on religious meanings as well as secular ones. In this light, much of the previous literature on forgiving others has focused on the role of a person's religiosity in their attitudes toward forgiving others.

Previous research on people's attitudes toward forgiving others have found that measures of religiosity, like church attendance, strength of religious commitment, and identification as a Christian are positively associated with valuing forgiving others (Edwards, Lapp-Rincker, Magyar-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, Brown, and Lopez 2002;

Macaskill 2007; Mullet, Barros, Frongia, Usae, Neto, and Shafighi 2003; Rokeach 1969). The research conducted here has aimed to replicate these findings using a nationally representative sample of adults.

Another goal of this research is to provide a deeper understanding of forgiveness in American society. With potential social disruptions a click of the mouse of away, the idea and practice of forgiving others takes on a greater importance. Increased understanding of the processes related to forgiving others can provide useful information for all sociologists, especially those studying religious groups or interpersonal conflicts of any kind. More specifically, sociologists studying religion will be interested in how the internalization of Christian values has lead to differences in the way people a talk and go about forgiving others.

A final aim of this research project is to address the shortcomings present in the literature on forgiveness. Most research uses survey data from samples that are not representative of any population. As a result, much of the research on forgiveness lacks the capability to make generalizable claims. To address this weakness in the literature I use two representative samples, one representative to the U.S. population over 18 (the GSS), and another representative of members of religious groups within the United States (Wuthnow's Forgiveness Survey). I incorporated in-depth interview data into this analysis with the aim of answering questions that survey data alone could not provide sufficient answers to. Furthermore, very few studies on forgiveness use qualitative data, thus making it difficult to gain a deep understanding of the forgiveness process and of the personal and social contexts conducive or not conducive to forgiveness.

In part one of this thesis I used data from the 1998 General Social Survey to test whether measures of religiosity were related to respondents answers to a question about their attitudes toward forgiving others. Results from a multivariate statistical model controlling for background variables showed that both church attendance and strength of religious involvement were positively associated with whether or not a respondent says that he or she always forgive those who hurt them. Individuals who attend church frequently and those who say that they are very religious are more likely than others to report always forgiving those who hurt them. Likewise, evangelicals are also more likely than those with no religious preference to have positive attitudes toward forgiving others. Catholics, and non-evangelical Protestants were no more likely than those without a religious preference to report always forgiving those who hurt them.

While these findings replicate those of past studies in several ways, they also build upon them. Most studies interested in people's attitudes toward forgiving others have found that measures of religiosity are strong predictors. More specifically, studies investigating forgiveness have found Christians to be more likely than others to report valuing forgiving others. The findings I present here go beyond these studies by demonstrating that a specific type of Christians, evangelicals, are the Christians who are most likely to have positive attitudes toward forgiving others.

As sociologists of religion have noted, evangelical Christians are amongst the fastest growing and most religiously committed individuals in the United States (Smith 1998; Stark and Finke 2000). With their larger commitment to church life in mind, it makes sense to hypothesize that evangelicals would be more likely than others to hold Christian values, like forgiving others. My analysis confirms this hypothesis, by

demonstrating that evangelicals, unlike members of other Christian religious groups, are more likely than those with no preference to report always forgiving those who hurt them.

In a more limited way, past research looking at forgiving behaviors has found that measures of religiosity have weaker or unexpected effects than they do on attitudes toward forgiving (Fox and Thomas 2008; Hui, Watkins, Wong, and Sun 2006; Toussaint and Williams 2008; Wuthnow 2000). These studies used a transgression-specific method, requiring respondents are asked to think about a specific instance of forgiveness, in order to determine whether or not individuals are engaging in forgiving behaviors.

In part two of this thesis I used data from the 1999 Forgiveness Survey to test whether measures of religiosity are related to a transgression-specific measure of forgiving behaviors. Results from a multivariate statistical model controlling for background variables showed that both church attendance and the importance of religion in the respondent's life were positively associated with whether or not a respondent agreed that being a member of their group helped them forgive another person. Those attending church most frequently and those reporting that religion was very important in their lives were more likely than others to report having engaged in a forgiving behavior. Past studies on forgiving behaviors had generally found a weak to non-existent relationship between measures of religiosity and forgiving behaviors. A possible reason for this contradiction in findings is generalizability. While past studies did not use generalizable samples, the Forgiveness Survey interviewed a nationally representative sample of members of religious groups. The nationally representative findings from the

Forgiveness Survey are likely to provide a more accurate representation of forgiving than surveys with non-random samples, therefore leading to different results.

The findings presented here also provide support for several sociological theories. Weber's theory of value-rational action stated that individuals who are attracted to a particular value, like forgiveness, would feel more obligated to act in accordance with those values. Individuals with high levels of church attendance, who are strongly religious, and are from an evangelical church, are most likely to value forgiving others. Findings from the Forgiveness Survey also found that measures of religiosity are associated with engagement in forgiving behaviors. These findings provide support for Weber's theory of value-rational action. Those most likely to value forgiving others are also the most likely to engage in forgiving behaviors. It appears that individual's values lead them to act in certain ways.

Individuals also seem to forgive others based on other types of social action as described by Weber (1978). For instance, recall that many interviewees mentioned how they were less likely to forgive others in the past because of their stubbornness. This could be characterized by affectual action, or action motivated by an emotional response. In these cases, the action on not forgiving, is based on an emotional response to the transgressor/ transgression. Later in their lives, most respondents reported that their attitudes towards forgiving had evolved and they are more likely to forgive because time has healed harmful actions done to them in the past. This type of forgiving would be characterized as instrumentally rational because it is based on a rational choice to forgive another with specific goals in mind. In other words, individuals in these scenarios forgave

because it didn't make sense to hold on to their anger or hurt any longer and they wanted to be relieved of the burden of holding a grudge.

Attitudes vs. behavior theory (AVB) is in many ways, but not necessarily, a counter to Weber's theory of value-rational action. AVB states that measures of people's attitudes are always going to over-estimate individual's behaviors. AVB was not supported by the findings presented here. Those who valued forgiving others the most, those with high church attendance and strength of religious involvement, were also most likely to engage in forgiving behaviors, even after controlling for whether or not the individual had a falling out with a friend, spouse, or neighbor in the previous year. While AVB was not supported in this analysis, it was also not disproven. A true test of AVB would need to include an observation of the behavior actually occurring. A study like this would be able to test the extent to which the value of forgiving others is held as well as seeing which individuals actually forgave others in certain situations.

Another main goal of this research was to observe the relation of age to both attitudes toward forgiving others and forgiving behaviors. Some research in this area has looked at the relations between age and forgiving others and age and religious involvement, but no study has examined, the three variables at the same time. Research that has been done, however, has shown that religiosity and positive attitudes toward forgiving others increase with age.

The research on forgiving attitudes using the GSS was unable to replicate the finding that age is associated with attitudes toward forgiving others after religiosity was controlled for. Measures of religiosity, like church attendance, and strength of religious involvement were better predictors of attitudes toward forgiveness than age. On the

Forgiveness Survey, however, when respondents are asked about forgiving behaviors, age has a decidedly different effect. There is a negative relationship between age and forgiving behaviors. Older individuals are less likely than younger people to report that their religious group had helped them forgive another.

Both life course theory, and theories about socialization provide some possible explanations for this relationship. Theories of socialization generally purport that when individuals participate in groups, they internalize the norms and values of that group and make them their own. In that sense, as an individual gets older within the values of a Christian religious organization that values the forgiving of others, they will likely also hold that value themselves. However, they might also be less likely to agree that being a member of their group helped them forgive another. Because they have already internalized that value of forgiving and made it their own, older individuals (or those who have spent the longest amount of time in the organization) are likely to see the value of forgiving others as unique to them, not something they learned through group membership. A younger group member, in that case, might be more likely to recognize the group's influence on their actions, than an older group member. Another possible explanation, of course, is that older individuals do not need the group to help them forgive others. Younger individuals with less life experience might need more assistance when it comes to dealing with the complex emotions that can arise when another person hurts them. Adults and other older individuals might have more experience, and thus, have more tools to deal with the situation.

In-depth interview data also provides insight into the findings regarding age and religiosity. Regarding attitudes toward forgiving others, most interviewees stressed the

importance of seeing forgiveness as a process learned throughout a lifetime. However, when asked about the church's role in their forgiving behavior many interviewees were unclear on its role. While some interviewees were quick to give their religious involvement credit for the values they learned towards forgiving, others said the passage of time was what helped them forgive others the most.

Along these lines, several patterns emerged from the interviews. When asked about the processes involved in their forgiving of others, most interviewees mentioned their inability to forgive in certain circumstances, unconditional forgiveness, and instances where moving on in a certain situation did not mean they forgave the transgressor. Along with these patterns, most interviewees also mentioned how their attitudes toward forgiving others have influenced the ways they look at politicians and other political figures. These patterns, while interesting in their own right, reveal several aspects of forgiving others that are unable to be captured through survey analysis. While survey analysis can ask about instances of or attitudes about forgiving others, in-depth interview data provides detailed understanding and meaning behind fixed-answer survey questions. As such, the interview data in this analysis, provided an invaluable look into the forgiving process amongst a particular group of individuals. For example, it was particularly value to hear individuals discuss how their attitudes toward forgiving others have changed over time. This allowed for increased understanding about the relative possibility of cohort vs. aging effects on attitudes toward forgiving.

In this study I used survey and in-depth interview data to contribute to filling several gaps in the literature on forgiveness and to understand the complex relations between age, religiosity, and forgiving others. There are however, some limitations. First,

this study used two different surveys to determine attitudes toward forgiving others and forgiving behaviors. It would be ideal if the same respondents were asked both a question about attitudes and a question about behaviors. Future research should aim to address this concern by asking both types of questions to one sample of respondents. Second, due to issues of social desirability, behaviors are difficult to measure using survey data. When asked questions about past behaviors respondents are likely to answer in ways that they would like to have acted. This can be helpful in that it demonstrates to the researcher what individuals thinks are desirable actions, but fails to measure actual instances of that action. Ideally, future research on behaviors would be of a qualitative nature, in order to determine the processes that go along with forgiving others. Finally, research conducted from a life course perspective should be conducted with longitudinal data to reduce biases that can result from having to think back into the past. Future research on forgiving others should use longitudinal data to better understand past instances of forgiveness and how forgiving others have changed over time. Furthermore, forgiveness is likely to depend on the nature of the transgression along with other social characteristics of the transgressor; future research should address this concern.

Recent years have seen an increase in religious involvement based on individual spirituality as opposed to church-based religion (Bellah et al. 1985). This increase in individual spirituality is likely to produce differences in the ways people learn about forgiving and the attitudes they have toward it. In this analysis, the least likely to value forgiving others were those with no formal religious preference. An increase in the number of people without a religious preference, therefore, is likely to decrease the amount of people who value the forgiving of others. However, forgiveness of others,

especially the public aspect of it, still appears to be a large part of Western culture. For these reasons, it makes sense to continue studying forgiveness, not just as a static idea passed down through scripture, but a dynamic process intertwined with secular societal values delineating right and wrong ways to act.

APPENDIX A

WEIGHTED ORDERED LOGISTIC REGRESSION PREDICTING ATTITUDES TOWARD FORGIVING OTHERS BY AGE

Table A1. Weighted ordered logistic regression predicting attitudes toward forgiving others by age

	Odds Ratio	Coefficient	p>z
Age (years)	1.010	0.010	**
cut 1		-2.636	
cut 2		-1.38	
cut 3		0.552	
F	8.98		
N	1,415		

* p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001

APPENDIX B

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building, 51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax 603-862-3564

08-Oct-2010

Schaefer, Andrew
Sociology, Horton Hall
9 Orchard Road
Bedford, MA 01730

IRB #: 4961
Study: The effect of age on the relationship between religious involvement and forgiving others
Approval Date: 04-Oct-2010

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 101(b). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/irb.html.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
Dillon, Michele

APPENDIX C

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

01-Aug-2011

Schaefer, Andrew
Sociology, Horton Hall
9 Orchard Road
Bedford, MA 01730

IRB #: 4961
Study: The effect of age on the relationship between religious involvement and forgiving others
Study Approval Date: 04-Oct-2010
Modification Approval Date: 26-Jul-2011
Modification: Addition of GSS Data

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your modification to this study, as indicated above. Further changes in your study must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to implementation.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* This document is available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Dillon, Michele

REFERENCES

Bellah, Robert N., Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. 1985. Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor Books.

Crosnoe, Robert and Glen H. Elder Jr. 2002. "Successful Adaptation in the Later Years: A Life Course Approach to Aging." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 65:309-328.

DIllon, Michele and Paul Wink. 2007. *In the Course of a Lifetime: Tracing Religious Belief, Practice, and Change*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Edwards, Lisa M., Regina H. Lapp-Rincker, Jeana L. Magyar-Moe, Jason D. Rehfeldt, Jamie A. Ryder, Jill C. Brown, and Shane J. Lopez. 2002. "A Positive Relationship Between Religious Faith and Forgiveness: Faith in the Absence of Data?" *Pastoral Psychology* 50:147-152.

Elder, Glen H., Jr. 1975. "Age Differentiation and the Life Course." *Annual Review of Sociology* 1:165-190.

Elder, Glen H. 1998. "The life course as developmental theory." *Child Development* 69:1.

Enright, Robert D., M. Santos, and R. Al-Mabuk. 1989. "The Adolescent as Forgiver." *Journal of Adolescence* 12:95-110.

Fox, Adam and Trang Thomas. 2008. "Impact of religious affiliation and religiosity on forgiveness." *Australian Psychologist* 43:175-185.

Gerth, H. H. and C. Wright Mills. 1946. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Scribner's and Sons.

Hackett, Conrad and D. Michael Lindsay. 2008. "Measuring Evangelicalism: Consequences of Different Operationalization Strategies." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47: 499-514

Hout, Michael and Andrew M. Greeley. 1987. "The Center Doesn't Hold: Church Attendance in the United States." *American Sociological Review* 52:325-345.

Hui, Eadaoin, David Watkins, Thomas Wong, and Rachel Sun. 2006. "Religion and Forgiveness from a Hong Kong Chinese Perspective." *Pastoral Psychology* 55:183-195.

Krause, Neal and Berit Ingersoll-Dayton. 2001. "Religion and the Process of Forgiveness in Late Life." *Review of Religious Research* 42:252-276.

Macaskill, Ann. 2007. "Exploring religious involvement, forgiveness, trust, and cynicism." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 10:203-218.

Manfredo, Machael J. and Bo Shelby. 1987. "The Effect of Using Self-Report Measures in Tests of Attitude-Behavior Relationships." *The Journal of Social Psychology* 128:731-743.

McCullough, Michael E. and Everett L. Worthington Jr. 1999. "Religion and the Forgiving Personality." *Journal of Personality* 67:1141-1164.

Mullet, Etienne, Jose Barros, Loredana Frongia, Veronica Usae, Felix Neto, and Sheila Riviere Shafighi. 2003. "Religious Involvement and the Forgiving Personality." *Journal of Personality* 71:1-19.

Park, Younghee and Robert D. Enright. 1997. "The Development of Forgiveness in the Context of Adolescent Friendship Conflict in Korea." *Journal of Adolescence* 20:393-402.

Rokeach, Milton. 1969. "Part I. Value Systems in Religion." *Review of Religious Research* 11:3-23.

Smith, Christian. 1998. "American EvangelicalismL Embattled and Thriving." Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

Smith, Nick. 2008. "I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies." New York: Cambridge University Press

Smith, Tom W. 1998. "A Review of Church Attendance Measures.." *American Socilogical Review*. 63: 131-136

Stark, Rodney and Roger Finke. 2000. Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion. Berkeley: The University of California Press

Subkoviak, Michael J., Robert D. Enright, Ching-Ru Wu, Elizabeth A. Gassin, Suzanne Freedman, Leanne M. Olson, and Issidoros Sarinopoulos. 1995. "Measuring Interpersonal Forgiveness in Late Adolescence and Middle Adulthood." *Journal of Adolescence* 18:641-655.

Toussaint, Loren L. and David R. Williams. 2008. "National Survey Results for Protestant, Catholic, and Nonreligious Experiences of Seeking Forgiveness and of

Forgiveness of Self, of Others, and by God." *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 27:120.

Toussaint, Loren L., David R. Williams, Marc A. Musick, and Susan A. Everson. 2001. "Forgiveness and Health: Age Differences in a U.S. Probability Sample." *Journal of Adult Development* 8:249.

Tsang, Jo-Ann, Michael E. McCullough, and William T. Hoyt. 2005. "Psychometric and Rationalization Accounts of the Religion-Forgiveness Discrepancy." *Journal of Social Issues* 61:785-805.

Warner, R. Stephen. 1988. "New Wine in Old Wineskins: Evangelicals and Liberals in a Small-Town Church." Berkeley: University of California Press

Weber, Max. 1978. Economy and Society. Berkeley: University of California Press

Woodbury, Robert D. And Christian S. Smith. 1998. "Fundamentalism et al: Conservative Protestants in America. *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 25-56

Wuthnow, Robert. 2000. "How Religious Groups Promote Forgiving: A National Study." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religon* 39:125.